

# **Factors Affecting the Choice of University in Thailand among Thai International High School Student's Grade 11 and Grade 12 in the Central Bangkok Area**

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## **Abstract**

In Thailand, the higher education institute both public and private required many marketing activities to attracting students because of globalization and demographic transitions. The main target of the marketplace is the Higher School Students especially for the International study programs at Grade 11 and 12. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors affecting Thai international high school student's (G.11 and G.12) in the central Bangkok area choice of university in Thailand and to develop a richer understanding of each determinant factors. The researcher collected the sample size of 179 respondents, from a combined population of 300 Ekamai and Trinity International School, through survey questionnaires using convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods. The analysis was then conducted using multiple linear regression to test hypotheses to determine whether each independent variable has a statistical influence on choice of university. Major findings from this survey are that tuition fee, parental influence, location of university, educational facility, and institution reputation have statistical influences on choice of university. The result means that the respondents are significantly concerned about all these independent variables which includes tuition fee, parental influence, location of university, educational facility, and institution reputation and that all these variables significantly affect choice of university.

**Keywords :** higher education, college choice decision, marketing strategies, marketing communication strategies

## **Introduction**

In terms of international education, Asia is the largest market with 55 percent of the total international school market are to be found in Asia. Moreover, the Asia-Pacific region is predicted to have as many as 7,000 international schools and more

than 5 million students by 2024. Additionally, Southeast Asia is currently home to over 800 international schools which cater to over 300,000 students. (Ping, 2016)

The International school sector demand in each country in AEC is expected to be increasing due to the growing demand for high-quality English language education as it is recognized as an economic bloc's official language. (Maxwell, 2016)

Moreover, international education has transformed tremendously from servicing expatriate families to now catering to local middle-class students. In Thailand, there are 176 international schools and over 65,000 international school students and the growth in the international school sector looks set to continue (Maxwell, 2016).

There are around 170 universities in Thailand offering in a total of up to more than 4,100 study programs. However, the student's enrollment in most universities in Thailand is significantly decreasing each year. A total of up to 150,000 spots was open for prospective students. However, only 80,000 students applied to take the entrance exams due to some change of conditions such as demographic transition which lead to a low level of birth rate because women with a higher education tend to marry late (Fredrickson, 2017).

It was predicted by The National Economic and Social Development Board that the number of Thais with school-age group of less than 21 years old will be only 20 percent of the population in 2040, which is a big drop from 62.3 percent in 1980. Also, on average per year, there is only 600,000-700,000 babies born in Thailand, a huge drop from 30 years ago where there are 1,000,000 babies born per year on average (Fredrickson, 2017).

Moreover, the trend of students in choosing majors is also significant where students applying for courses in the social sciences majors such as law, journalism, and mass communication are decreasing as students prefer to study in scientific areas over social science majors. Thus, Universities which want to stay financially healthy are considering downsizing, or even closing some of its social sciences majors (Asian Correspondent Staff, 2016).

### Research objectives

To identify the factors affecting Thai international high school student's (G.11 and G.12) in the central Bangkok area choice of university in Thailand. Also, to develop a richer understanding of each determinant factors.

### Statement of the problem

There are around 170 universities in Thailand offering a total of up to more than 4,100 study programs. However, the student's enrollment in most universities in Thailand is significantly decreasing each year. On the other hand, demand for international school in Thailand has transformed tremendously, and the growth is higher and higher each year.

### Scope of the research

The target respondents of this research are students in G.11 and G.12 at an international school located in the central Bangkok area of Thailand and who plan to enroll with a university in Thailand. In this research, the choice of university is a dependent variable which is affected by tuition fee, parental influence, institution reputation, educational facility, and locations of the university which are independent variables.

### Limitation of the research

The researcher used convenience sampling and snowball sampling as methods of collecting data from 179 respondents studying G11 and G12 at two international schools located in central of Bangkok. Therefore, the results do not represent the opinion of students studying at an international school located in central of Bangkok because the questionnaire were not distributed at other international schools located in central Bangkok area. Thus, data results cannot be generalized to a different population. In other words, the results have low external validity.

### Significance of the study

Since there is an ever-increasing difficulty for institutions of higher education in attracting students, the current university in Thailand has to find ways to maintain its level of student enrollment. The effect of globalization (Asian Correspondent Staff, 2016) and demographic transition which leads to low levels of fertility are changing higher education in Thailand. (Fredrickson, 2017) Moreover, International education has transformed tremendously with a higher and higher number of graduates each

year. There are 176 international schools in Thailand and over 65,000 international school students. (Maxwell, 2016) Thus, universities in Thailand have to find ways to influence students to select them as a preferred choice of university. The previous research found that Choice Theory (Crossman, 2010), Student Choice Model (Fattal, 2010), and 7P's marketing mix model (Manoku, 2014) can be applied to assess the choice of university. Therefore, this research studies the statistical influence of student choice and 7P's marketing mix variables on a choice of the university toward universities in Thailand.

The study can be used as an implication for universities in Thailand on how to build themselves to become the prefer choice of university in Thailand.

## **Literature Review**

### **7P's marketing mix model**

According to Palmer (2011) there are some limitations to the traditional 4P's marketing mix tools in the service or education industry. These limitations stem from the nature of the educational service; it exceeds the 4P's to some other elements.

Kotler and Fox (1995) then later developed what was seen as an improved version of a marketing mix which was designed specifically for educational institutions which seem to help to address the limitations set by Palmer. Kotler and Fox's (1995) model depicts this marketing mix in the educational context to be consisting of seven marketing tools, "7Ps": 'programme, price, place promotion, processes, physical facilities, and people' (see Figure 2.1). To support this 7P's model, there are other mentions of other elements for the marketing mix such as Ivy and Naude (2004) "7Ps" and Ivey (2008) "7Ps", 'programme, prospectus, price, prominence, people, promotion, premiums' in which all these models share a similar component elements. Nevertheless, they just clustered and grouped differently.

According to Fattal (2010) this model and its elements should be used by universities as a framework to rethink the components of their services as it encompasses all of the elements mentioned by other models.



*Figure 1: 7P's marketing mix model*

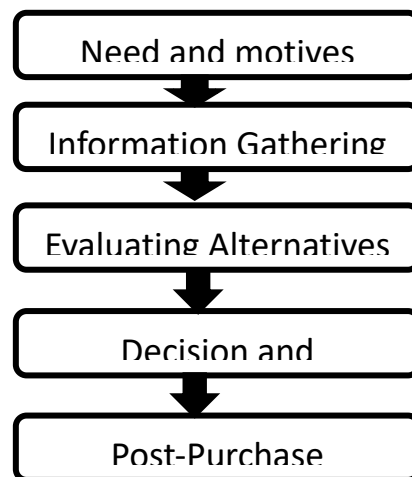
Moreover, this model will be reflected in student university choice model that will be discussed at a later stage of this study. Wright (1999) mentioned that different customers may demand different combinations of the marketing mix elements and that what is missing in the 7P's marketing mix model is going to be synthesized with consumer behavior in the buyer decision-making model. It can be stated that customer analysis influences the design of each of the marketing mix elements (Peter & Olson, 2008). It is assumed to add more relevancy and depth to the 7P's marketing mix model as stated by Wright (1999) that in order to achieve a better understanding of the marketing strategies and mix, and reach into an effective marketing strategy, there is a need to understand customer demands, preferences and buying behavior (see Figure 2)



*Figure 2: Student university choice model*

### Student choice model

According to Fattal (2010) student choice process is a complex series of activities, where they participate and act differently and that five steps of student choice are needs and motives, information gathering, evaluating alternatives, decision, and post-choice evaluation (see Figure 2.3). Firstly, a need occurs. Then as the student realizes that he/she wants to pursue universities, they search for information about universities. Then an evaluation between alternatives is established. The student then goes to enroll and ends up with an evaluation of the experience.



*Figure 3: Student choice process model*

As mentioned above, this particular model can, therefore, be used to explain student choice of university. On the other hand, it can also be used to support how the 7P's marketing mix model affects student's choice of university.

### Choice theory

According to Crossman (2010) people are monetarily motivated and tend to take into consideration the opportunity of profit making in which they appraise the possible costs and benefits of future before making any decision. People, in general, share similar needs, though individuals might behave in different ways to satisfy those needs (Glasser, 1998). Moreover, it was stressed out that people will always make their choice depending on the five influential factors which are personal, social, economic, psychological, and environmental factors (Kitsawad, 2013).

### The relationship between tuition fee and choice of university

According to Fattal (2010) as part of a pricing strategy, a university with better overall offering and position could charge a higher fee. Hence, a student would pay a higher price for a more reputable university. On the other hand, discount and scholarship offers could also be used to effect the students' choices to enroll with the universities that offer the most generous offer to them. Dao and Thorpe (2015) also support this and found that financial aid and scholarship might not directly relate to price, it can provide an opportunity to reduce the costs of studying which is a positive influence. Thus, the tuition fee is a significant predictor that influences a student's university choice decision.

### The relationship between Parental influence and choice of university

Kitsawad (2013) found that particularly in Thailand, parents tend to have an input to guide and persuade their child to select the university that they agreed and accepted. Moreover, Thai child are highly dependent on their parents in making a big and important decision.

### The relationship between the location of university and choice of university

Ming (2010) found that location of the university is a factor for the student in selecting their university of choice as an important factor in student predisposition to attend university is the proximity of an institution to home. Moreover, students who live close to campus are more likely to attend university though they may not attend the campus located near home.

### The relationship between educational facility and choice of university

Dao and Thorpe (2015) found that facility is the most important factor to student's choice of university. It helps provide an immediate clue for prospective students about a university's identity and that the condition of the physical location contributes greatly on the image of the university and thus affect the student's choice of university (Fattal, 2010).

### The relationship between institution reputation and choice of university

Ming (2010) stated that institution reputation is highly persuasive for the student in their university search and selection process. It was indicated that student's

decision to enroll at the institution are highly influenced by the image and reputation of the university.

#### Choice of university (DV)

Refers to the preference and decision of individual in selecting an educational institution for higher education in relation with their respective need satisfaction (Glasser, 1998) and the evaluation of possible costs and benefits for their future life. (Crossman, 2010). Therefore, as universities brace themselves against multiple challenges to the attractiveness of a university education, understanding the determinants of selection is becoming increasingly important.

Table 1

#### *Key Theories related to the framework*

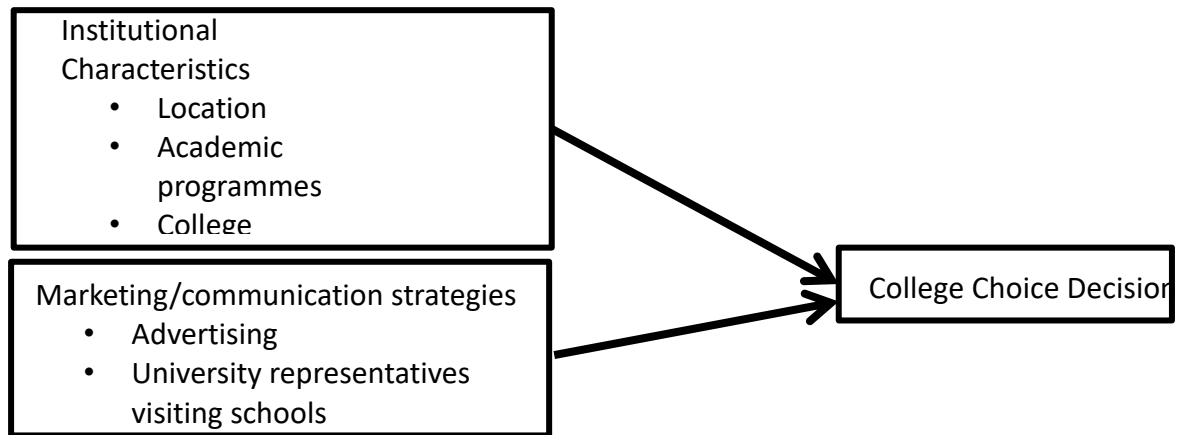
| <b>Theory</b>            | <b>Author (year)</b>                               | <b>The variable that applied to the research</b>          |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| 7P's marketing mix model | Fattal (2010) Manoku (2014), Dao and Thorpe (2015) | Tuition fee, location of university, educational facility |
| Student choice model     | Fattal(2010)                                       | Tuition fee, location of university, educational facility |
| Choice theory            | Glasser (1998), Crossman (2010), Kitsawad (2013)   | Parental influence, institution reputation                |

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework was developed based on 7P's marketing mix model, student choice model and choice theory that was already discussed in the literature review. From the conceptual framework, there are five factors that have an influence on choice of university which are tuition fee, parental influence, location of university, educational facility, and institution reputation.



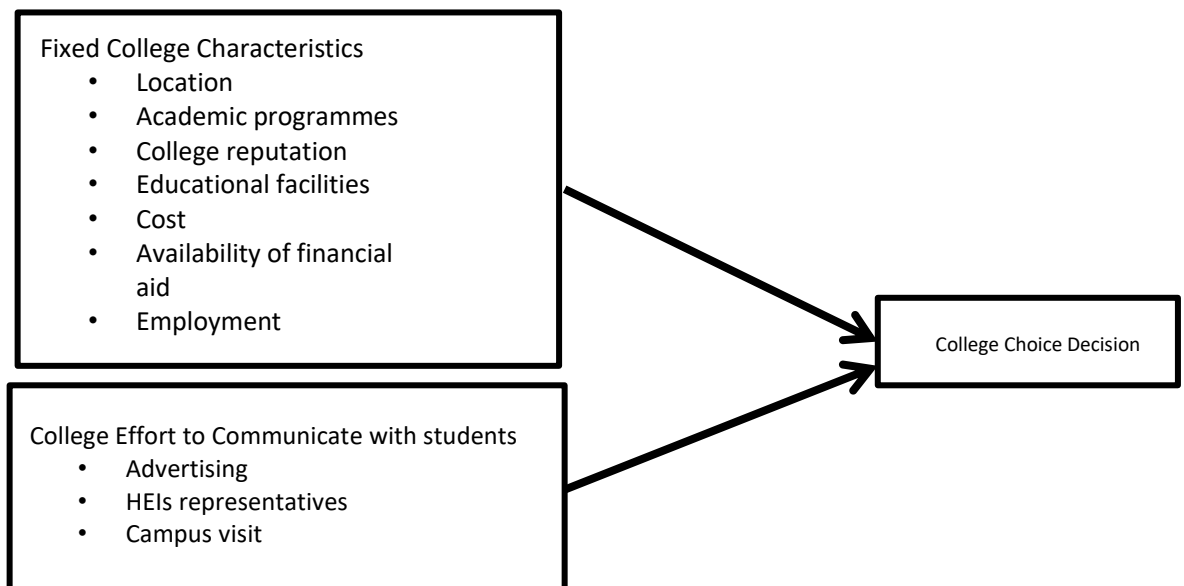
### Theoretical background



*Figure 4: Theoretical Framework*

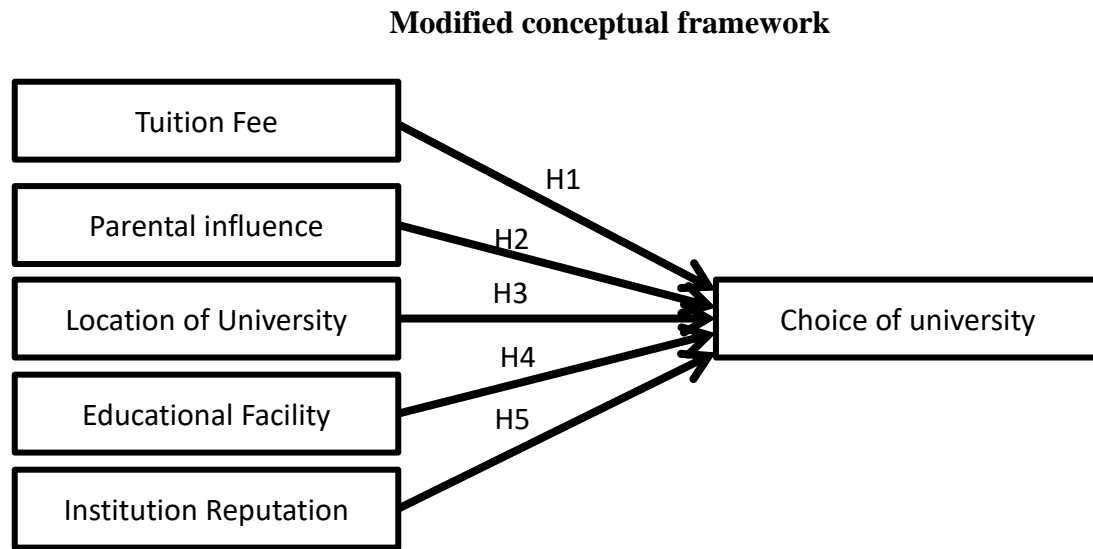
Source: Avinash Tirumalai and Babli Kumari 2017, Factors that influence students' choice of a university at Botho University in Botswana.

Avinash Tirumalai and Babli Kumari 2017 studied the impact of student choice factors on students' choice of a university. They developed a research model from Ming and Avram framework. Researchers of this paper identified and explored student choice factors and marketing mix strategies that would impact the choice of university. There are 300 respondents from a population of 1240 Botho university undergraduate students. The result of this research supports the model of this research.



*Figure 5: The Theoretical framework of Institutional factors influencing students' college choice decision in Malaysia.*

Joseph Sia Kee Ming 2010 studied the impact of Institutional factors on students' choice of college. The researcher developed a research model from Joseph (2000) framework. Researchers of this paper identified and explored the institutional factors that would impact the choice of university. The result of this research supports the model of this research.



*Figure 6: Conceptual Framework*

### Hypotheses

H1: Tuition fee statistically influences choice of university

H2: Parental influence statistically influences choice of university

H3: Location of university statistically influences choice of university

H4: Educational facility statistically influences choice of university

H5: Institution reputation statistically influences choice of university

### Research Methodology

#### Methods of research used

Quantitative research is used for this study. First, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha method to measure the reliability of each variable in the primary data, showing satisfactory values exceeding 0.7 or reached close values can be accepted (Nunnally, 1978). Second, descriptive analysis is used to identify the

demographic and characteristic data which collected from respondents. Lastly, multiple linear regression is used to predict the statistical cause and effect relationship among variables.

In the questionnaire, the researcher used ‘a five-point Likert scale’ by providing a rating for 5 levels: Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5.

## **Respondents and Sampling procedures**

### **Target population**

The target population in this study was focused on Thai international high school students (G.11 and G.12) in central Bangkok area. The researcher selected to focus on this target due to the transformation of international education in Thailand where the growth is more is more each year. Hence, more international school graduates than ever before are searching for a university to further their education at a university in Thailand (Maxwell, 2016).

### **Sample size**

The researcher collected the sample from 179 qualified respondents

### **Sampling procedure**

The researcher used convenience and snowball sampling method to collect the data due to limited time and resources.

### **Research instruments (questionnaire)**

The questionnaire was designed based on the conceptual framework and the previous studies. To test the reliability, the researcher conducted a pre-test with 30 respondents, and the results are shown in the Table 2. The researcher used Cronbach’s alpha method for reliability test of each variable. Cronbach’s Alpha should be greater than 0.7 to be accepted (Nunnally, 1978). As a result, all six variables have Cronbach’s Alpha results of more than 0.7. Hence, all variable is reliable enough, and the questionnaire are ready for mass distribution.

### **Table 2**

*Pre-testing Result (N=30)*

| <b>Variable</b>        | <b>Number of items</b> | <b>Cronbach's Alpha</b> |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Tuition fee            | 3                      | .902                    |
| Parental influence     | 4                      | .969                    |
| Location of university | 3                      | .919                    |
| Educational facility   | 4                      | .938                    |
| Institution reputation | 4                      | .941                    |
| Choice of university   | 3                      | .865                    |
| <b>All Variables</b>   | <b>21</b>              | <b>.959</b>             |

*Note:* Reliability value > 0.7 can be accepted (Nunnally, 1978)

#### Data Collection Method

The researcher collected data by using survey questionnaires distributed at two particular international schools (Ekamai and Trinity international school) via Lines application for 179 respondents.

#### Data Analysis

To manage collected data to be meaningful, the researcher selected descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis as the statistical tools for data analysis of this study.

#### Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis is used to conduct respondents' demographics and characteristics such as grade, age, educational budget, who they currently lived with, and who will be responsible for their university fee. The analysis was also used to identify proportion of male and female respondents in the survey as well as their respective tuition budget range and educational level.

#### Multiple linear regression analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis is used to predict the statistical relationship among variables so this analysis helps researchers to understand more in terms of relation movement between dependent variable and independent variables.

Moreover, multiple linear regression analysis is used to study more about relationship of each independent variable and dependent variable. Researcher also identify the value of influence which help to weigh the variables. Therefore, researcher need this analysis to indicate which independent variables are related to the dependent variable and which one is the most influential.

## Data Analysis

In this part, the researcher discussed about analysis result from the data and findings by dividing into three sections. First part is descriptive statistics to indicate the result of respondents' demographical data and descriptive analysis by using mean and standard deviation of all variables. Second part is testing of reliability before conducting the analysis to test hypothesis. The last part is checking average mean between student's choice of university in G.11 and student's choice of university in G.12. All this process could be the direction for the last chapter of the study which is conclusion and recommendation that would be useful for researcher, universities in Thailand and academic students.

## Descriptive statistics demographic characteristic

Table 3: Summary of Descriptive statistic of demographic

| Demographics                                 | Categories           | Frequency | Percent |
|--|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender                                       | Female               | 104       | 58.1    |
| Educational Level                            | G.11                 | 93        | 52.0    |
| University budget/allowance until graduation | 300,001-600,000 Baht | 170       | 95.0    |
| Currently living with                        | With family          | 179       | 100.0   |
| Paying for university tuition fee            | Parents              | 179       | 100.0   |

## Descriptive Analysis of Main Variables

In this section, descriptive analysis include mean and standard deviation was applied to summarize the respondent's opinion toward five independent variables

(tuition fee, educational facility, parental influence, location of university, and institution reputation) and dependent variable is choice of university. All above factors are tested on 5-point scale with range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The calculation of class interval was done by maximum score minus minimum score and divided by the maximum score, which the difference of score ranges equal to 0.80 for each interval class.

| 5-point scale | Descriptive rating         |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| 4.21 – 5.00   | Strongly agree             |
| 3.41 – 4.20   | Agree                      |
| 2.61 – 3.40   | Neither agree nor disagree |
| 1.80 – 2.60   | Disagree                   |
| 1.00 – 1.81   | Strongly disagree          |

#### Hypotheses Testing Results

In this section, multiple linear regression was applied to estimate the prediction of five independent variables (tuition fee, educational facility, parental influence, location of university, and institution reputation) and it has effect on the choice of university. The acceptance of a statistically significant relationship between independent variables and dependent variable, the p-value or significant level (Sig.) should less than 0.05 for rejected null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and accept the alternate hypothesis ( $H_a$ ).

The assessment of adjusted R-square and ANOVA test was done in order to estimate how the multiple linear regressions model is well works with the datasets. According to table 4, the adjusted R square was found equal to 0.606 which means 60.6% of the variance in choice of university could be forecasted five independent variables (tuition fee, educational facility, parental influence, location of university, and institution reputation). Moreover, the F-statistic was found a significant level is less than 0.05, which the prediction of choice of university is fitted by four dependent variables ( $F = 55.849$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

Table 4

*Regression analysis – model summary*

| R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| .786 <sup>a</sup> | .617     | .606              | .24225                     |

Table 5

*Regression analysis – ANOVA test*

|            | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| Regression | 16.388         | 5   | 3.278       | 55.849 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual   | 10.153         | 173 | .059        |        |                   |
| Total      | 26.540         | 178 |             |        |                   |

Before examining the association between independent variables and dependent variable by utilizing multiple linear regression, it was recommended to detect the presence of multicollinearity. The multicollinearity refers to a phenomenon where two or more variables have too high correlated each other, which is possibly violate the accuracy of analysis. The presence of multicollinearity was detected by using collinearity statistics, tolerance and variance inflation factors (VIF). According to the rule of thumb suggested by Walker and Almond (2010), the cut-off of VIF should be not higher than 5 and tolerance is expected to be less than 0.20. From table 4.13, the result shows tolerance is all above 0.20 and VIF is less than 5. It represented no existing of multicollinearity in this model.

Table 6

*Regression analysis – coefficient analysis*

|                        | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics |       |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|-------------------------|-------|
|                        | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      | Tolerance               | VIF   |
| (Constant)             | .719                        | .235       |                           | 3.054 | .003 |                         |       |
| Tuition fee            | .170                        | .048       | .188                      | 3.509 | .001 | .770                    | 1.299 |
| Parental influence     | .156                        | .039       | .235                      | 4.032 | .000 | .649                    | 1.540 |
| Location of university | .131                        | .043       | .169                      | 3.031 | .003 | .712                    | 1.405 |
| Educational facility   | .188                        | .051       | .225                      | 3.702 | .000 | .598                    | 1.671 |
| Institution reputation | .208                        | .043       | .266                      | 4.786 | .000 | .717                    | 1.396 |

a. Dependent Variable: Choice of university

From the coefficient analysis, the result found all predictors have significant level of less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the result shows all factors have positive beta coefficient. It means tuition fee, educational facility, parental influence, location of university, and institution reputation have significant and positively impacted on a choice of university at 0.05 significant level. According to beta coefficients, it indicates institution reputation has the strongest and positive impact on choice of university (Beta = 0.208), followed by educational facility (Beta = 0.188), tuition fee (Beta = 0.170), parental influence (Beta = 0.156), and location of university (Beta = 0.131), respectively. Thus, the results can be a supportive information to accept or reject hypothesis in the further section.

### Hypotheses Testing

The summary of regression model shows 60.6% of the variance in choice of university can be impacted by five independent variables (tuition fee, educational facility, parental influence, location of university, and institution reputation). Furthermore, the VIF and tolerance found in the analysis show no presence of a multicollinearity issue.



According to hypotheses testing, it shows all hypothesis include H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 were supported. The results implied all independent variables have positively associated to the choice of university at 0.05 level. The beta coefficient level revealed institution reputation is the mostly impacted on choice of university (Beta = 0.208), followed by educational facility (Beta = 0.188), tuition fee (Beta = 0.170), parental influence (Beta = 0.156), and location of university (Beta = 0.131). As the strongest attribute of student's choice of university, the finding was supported to the study of Ming (2010) claimed on the institution reputation is a strong preference on student's choice when they will decide on choosing a university. It means student are mostly concerned on about the institution reputation when they have willingness to make a choice for selecting university. Furthermore, the educational facility is the second highest indicators of student's choice, it was supported by many scholars who mentioned the facilities are essential to represent the university's image, which is greatly attractive student to gain higher willingness to attend a university (Fattal, 2010; Dao and Thrope, 2015). Moreover, the study has been confirmed on the relationship among tuition fee and parenteral on choice of university from an international student, which are supported to Dao and Thorpe (2015), financial aids bring a good opportunity for student and usually attracted them to attend the university, while study of Kitsawad (2013) confirmed that Thai parents have crucial role in allowing their children to decide the university choice.

Table 7

*Hypothesis Testing results*

| Statement   | Beta | Sig. | Results        |
|---|------|------|----------------|
| H1a: Tuition fee statistically influences choice of university            | .170 | .001 | Accepted<br>Ha |
| H2a: Parental influence statistically influences choice of university     | .156 | .000 | Accepted<br>Ha |
| H3a: Location of university statistically influences choice of university | .131 | .003 | Accepted<br>Ha |
| H4a: Educational facility statistically influences choice of university   | .188 | .000 | Accepted<br>Ha |

|   |      |      |                |
|---|------|------|----------------|
| H5a: Institution reputation statistically influences choice of university | .208 | .000 | Accepted<br>Ha |
|---|------|------|----------------|

## Summary and Recommendations

### Recommendation

The empirical findings of this research have been contributed a useful information for the management team in the higher education institutions to develop an appropriate strategy for influencing the international students from international schools in Thailand to attend the university. The study has discovered all factors related to marketing mix variables, including of tuition fee, educational facility, parental influence, location of university, and institution reputation are positively impacted on a student's choice of the university toward universities in Thailand. Thus, the management team should consider about the long-term planning and understand how they became the prefer choice of university in Thailand.

The reputation of institution is the most important facts on the university choice. The institutions should pay high attention on the academic excellence. Because the academic reputation could reflect an opportunity for the career to a student after their graduation. Furthermore, the use of mixed marketing communication tools is very important for representing the university image and creating a positive word-of-mouth. For example, a use of social media channels for an educational guidance and promoting universities strengths and values in a way that differentiates them from competitors. Moreover, they should use the marketing communication tools to promote the school facilities, location, and human resource such as well-known professors and instructors from a faculty.

The impact of parenteral influence in the choice of university should not be underestimated. Since the study revealed a crucial role of parents influences on their children's choice of a higher education. Thus, the university should take into an account by communicating with not only students but also their parents. It should be done by informing the way of their children should be received whether graduated from this university is worthwhile for what the parent spends. Additionally, the financial aids and scholarships information should be available and easily accessed by

the students and parents, which is possibly enhance their decision choice toward the university.

#### Suggestion for the further study

It could be explained the lack of generalization in a finding was represented as the main limitation of this research, as a convenience sampling was applied. Therefore, it should be appropriate to use probability sampling for reaching all possible samples from any international school located in central of Bangkok.

Since the current study only focused on five independent variables (tuition fee, educational facility, parental influence, location of university, and institution reputation) to examine Thai international high school student's (G.11 and G.12) in the central Bangkok area choice of university in Thailand. However, there is still have a potential for making an expansion of study area. According to theoretical frameworks represented in the study (Tirumalai and Kumari, 2017; Ming, 2010), there are many factors that not yet discover it has a relationship with student's choice of university in the current research. For instant, the marketing communicational factors and service attributes such as service quality from the academic staff. Thus, the further research might include these variables by making an adjustment of a conceptual framework.

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